

Video International's U.S.

correspondent, Laura West, on the set of the new *Batman* film starring Michael Keaton, Jack Nicholson, Jerry Hall and Kim Basinger.

"I hope this movie is not perceived as a comedy because it is fairly dark and violent," admitted screen writer Sam Hamm about what has become one of the most eagerly awaited films of 1989. "But the essential premise of *Batman* is a comedic one. It is about a guy who has a bizarre hobby that totally screws up his life. He's a millionaire, a rich guy who could have anything he wants, and the only thing that seems to satisfy him is to dress up as a bat, go out and kick ass. To my mind, this movie is really about what happens when Batman, who has made this insane decision, starts to go sane."

Batman first donned his cape in May 1939, and has been crusading against crime ever since - in 600-plus issues of his own comic book, two Saturday afternoon serials in the 1940s, the tongue-in-cheek television series of the 1960s and a spin-off movie in 1966 which tried and failed to cash in on the TV show's popularity.

For Warner Brothers, the film is a \$30 million dollar gamble and all fingers are crossed, hoping that the public will flock to see the return of Gotham City's millionaire vigilante, Bruce Wayne, who decides to turn himself into a masked crime fighter.

In that role is Michael Keaton, who was last seen as the ghost with the most in the comedy, *Beetlejuice*. Missing is Robin, perhaps because the producers wanted to head off the inevitable wisecracks about Batman's sexual inclinations. Robin's place is taken by Kim Basinger as the caped crusader's love interest. Jack Nicholson plays Batman's nemesis, The Joker.

Hamm is sure that the *Batman* TV show of the sixties will not be an obstacle to the new movie in spite of the fact that Adam West, who played Batman in the sixties, has said that people won't accept the movie without him in the title role. "Batman is a character that predates Adam West by more than 25 years," explained Hamm. "And with the current Batman renaissance, where the character has become so hot, I don't really feel it is the same. Our agenda from the beginning was, 'don't do the TV show'. I liked the TV series and watched it every week when I was a kid but it's a totally different treatment of *Batman*."

Hamm remains confident that, unlike many other comic book adaptations, like the *Spiderman* TV show and *Superman 3* and *4*, *Batman* will be successful as it captures the charm of the original source material. "The thing that always seems a cop-out and afflicts all of the *Superman* movies is that,



Holy re-makes! *Batman's back!*

whenever there is a key dramatic moment where you can take it seriously or you go cute, the impulse is to go cute. It's always the wink at the audience as if to say, 'Well it's a comic book, it's a kids story, so we can tweak it and not follow through on the material's implications'. But this is not the same story as *Superman* at all. It doesn't have the same kind of opening with flashy stuff like a planet blowing up."

And what of the Batmobile, Batman's famous mode of transport? Said production designer Anton Furst, pictured here with his creation, "It is macho and rude. We wanted it to be intimidating. It would be very serious if we'd come up with a boring Batmobile."

- Laura West.

